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BUCK CLIFFORD ROSENBERG

DANGEROUS HOUSES

Scientific Lifestyle Television and Risk Management

BUCK CLIFFORD ROSENBERG IS A THOMAS & MARGARET RUTH MCARTHUR FELLOW IN ANTHROPOLOGY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MELBOURNE. HE RESEARCHES THE ROLE OF LIFESTYLE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY, AND HAS PUBLISHED ARTICLES ON LIFESTYLE MEDIA, IKEA, AND THE AUSTRALIAN "FOOTBALL WARS." HIS MORE RECENT RESEARCH FOCUSES ON RETIREMENT LIFESTYLES.

ABSTRACT The home, in its material and symbolic dimensions, holds a special place within the Anglophone countries of the West as a sphere of privacy and security, of sanctuary. Lifestyle television has played a key role in this process. Yet this article explores how two Australian lifestyle television programs, *Is Your House Killing You?* and *Carbon Cops*, present the home as a site of danger, either to the private sphere and its inhabitants or to the broader environmental public sphere. It is argued that such programs play a role in disseminating neoliberal ideologies, encouraging the implementation of governmental regimes to discipline, transform, and ultimately self-regulate householder and consumer behavior. Through such regimes, the subjects produce less dangerous houses, and

the home is restored as a sanctuary and site of ontological security.

KEYWORDS: lifestyle television, risk, ontological (in)security, governmentality, Australia

INTRODUCTION

> Your Home. It's your castle, your refuge and the very centre of your world. But what if the place you rely on to keep you and your family safe from harm was doing the exact opposite? What if there were unseen threats to your well-being, in the last place you'd expect to find them? What if your house was putting your health, and even your life, on the line?
>
> Opening credits to *Is Your House Killing You?*

The home, in both its material and symbolic dimensions, holds a special place within the Anglophone countries of the West. It is the epicenter of their citizens' emotional bonds, leisure practices, and financial portfolios. It is also a place of privacy and security. Within a late-modern world of globalization and risk, the notion of home as sanctuary has been reinforced, as it becomes increasingly fortified both physically and symbolically to create ontological security. Lifestyle television has played a key role in this process, by promoting aesthetic transformation as a symbolic act of protection, to make the home a fashionable sanctuary. Yet this article explores how two Australian lifestyle television programs present the home as a site of danger. The first, *Is Your House Killing You?*, presents houses as a risk to the private sphere and its inhabitants, through potentially lethal invisible dangers often stemming from "bad" householder behavior. The second, *Carbon Cops*, suggests that houses pose a dangerous threat to the broader environmental public sphere through their high carbon emissions. These programs, then, promote fear and anxiety, but also expert solutions. Through a close discourse and textual analysis of both programs, this article explores how scientific lifestyle experts establish homes as dangerous places—for self and other—which can be made safe through disciplining and transforming poor householder behavior.

RISK AND THE HOME

Houses and homes are multivalent structures that hold enormous cultural significance (Saunders and Williams 1988). But the home is usually represented and understood, in both academic literature and popular culture, as a sanctuary or protective cocoon. Richard Sennett (1990) has mapped the development of the modern home as a "sanctuary." He draws links between the role of medieval churches,

which provided spiritual and physical sanctuary within cities, and the modern home, which emerged as a new type of sanctuary during the Industrial Revolution. The "home," he writes, "became the secular version of spiritual refuge; the geography of safety shifted from a sanctuary in the urban center to the domestic interior" (1990: 21). This secular sanctuary became the focus of psychological development, a protective space to mold the young human character to produce good modern citizens (1990: 21–30).

Whilst the home has a history as a site of sanctuary, this symbolic role has become even more pronounced within late modernity. Fear and uncertainty are defining conditions of contemporary society. Life is risky, and there is much to be afraid of: terrorism, environmental destruction, crime, mobile capital, job insecurity, and a retreat by the state. Ulrich Beck (1999) suggests that the world has entered a new phase of modernity, where social life is underpinned by risk and its management. Our world is increasingly governed by risk management practices "to foresee and control the future consequences of human action, the various unintended consequences of radicalized modernization" (1999: 3).

Anthony Giddens has argued that the new conditions of modernity—or following Beck, risk society—have significantly affected the psychological constitution of individuals. Risky global modernity, through its ability to compress time and space, can lead to what he calls "ontological insecurity," a state of anxiety where an individual's sense of self can become destabilized through a lack of order (Giddens 1990). It is a response to a feeling that we live in a "runaway world" (Giddens 2002), where no one is in control, where even the state seems reluctant to help. Thatcher's words about the nonexistence of society appear prophetic: we are truly becoming individual, society is increasingly do-it-yourself (DIY) (see Tomlinson 1990). Our ontological insecurity, in countries like Australia and Britain, stems in part from the decline in collective support mechanisms such as state-run services, from knowing we must increasingly survive on our own. To make our insecurity greater, capital has become globally mobile, making employment, if available, tenuous (Harvey 1990). Consequently, the home increasingly functions to counterbalance the insecurities associated with global risk society, as it becomes the primary space of ontological security. It becomes, as David Harvey states, "a private museum to guard against the ravages of [global] time-space compression" (1990: 292) and the real or perceived decline of the public sphere, a place for individuals to gain control and create order.

The home as a sanctuary is as much material as it is symbolic. The typical house, in Gaston Bachelard's words, is "a major zone of protection" (1994: 31). It offers physical shelter from the outside, from the elements or potentially dangerous strangers. Yet it is the symbolic nature of the materiality of the house that makes the *home* a place of ontological security. The domestic space is so important because

of this fusion of the material and the symbolic: the house and the home. Bachelard writes that the individual "experiences the house in its reality and in its virtuality" (1994: 5) and that incursions of the material can undermine the power of the symbolic. We gain our ontological security from the mechanisms we set in place to protect both the house and (especially) the home. One such protective mechanism is consumption. Our recent obsession with the consumption and aestheticization of all facets of the home—witnessed in the rise of home-lifestyle television—may function as a process of assuaging our ontological insecurity by masking our anxieties towards a dangerous and risky world. The home becomes a site to which we can symbolically, ontologically, and physically retreat.

HOME-LIFESTYLE TELEVISION, NEOLIBERAL GOVERNANCE, AND SCIENTIFIC LIFESTYLE EXPERTS

Home and property television forms part of the larger genre known as "lifestyle television." There has been an explosion in such programming over the last two decades in Australia, Britain, and the USA (see Brunsdon 2003; O'Sullivan 2005; Rosenberg 2009). Lifestyle programs offer more than just tips on the latest kitchen styles or how to build a patio. Such programs—and especially those focusing on homes and DIY renovation—feed into an increasingly privatized DIY culture that is buttressed by entrepreneurialism, consumption, and neoliberal ideology. These programs both reflect and enable this emerging DIY culture, even if their impact on actual DIY home-renovation practice is questionable (Powell 2009; Rosenberg 2011). Lifestyle programs are hosted by a new type of expert, the lifestyle expert, who enacts forms of neoliberal governance at a distance through particular techniques, procedures, and discourses that shape viewers' behavior (Lewis 2008a). They offer tools for people to transform themselves, through making over their homes and gardens, or in other cases, their bodies and fashion sense.

Whilst property makeover shows emerged in Britain in the 1990s, they crossed the Atlantic (Kavka 2006) and found their spiritual home in the USA: the land of reinvention (Miller 2008). Toby Miller argues that the USA has both a history and imagined reality as a place where individuals (immigrants) can remake themselves by drawing upon and nourishing the country's entrepreneurial culture. Today, these individuals reinvent themselves through consumption, making over their internal and external selves through a combination of pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, and clothing (Miller 2008). This culture of reinvention is transforming notions of citizenship and is aided by popular media that are pivotal in shaping what it means to be a citizen. Indeed, Sarah Banet-Weiser suggests that "our sense of ourselves as national citizens emerges *from* (not in spite of) our engagement with the popular media" (2007: 2; emphasis in original). She argues that media and consumer culture reconstruct individuals as consumer-citizens,

creating a new cultural-political landscape whereby people increasingly "*understand* political rhetoric precisely because of their identities as consumers" (2007: 11; emphasis in original). But with new forms of cultural citizenship come new forms of governance.

Laurie Ouellette and James Hay propose that in neoliberal societies where the state is increasingly reluctant to govern, the most pressing obligation to society a citizen must fulfill is to "empower" him- or herself privately (2008: 3). They must become self-governing, self-regulating, and self-improving enterprising citizens who can—indeed must—literally Do-It-Themselves. Drawing on Foucault, Ouellette and Hay suggest that as we move deeper into a post-welfare society, governance increasingly takes the form of "governing at a distance," as governmentality is outsourced through popular culture—such as lifestyle television—and privatized and enacted by citizens. Governmentality, they argue, refers to the everyday techniques that individuals reflect upon, work on, and deploy to organize their lives, which increasingly become a condition of citizenship. For example, Jonathon Simon (2007) argues that rather than rely on state police protection, middle-class citizens must make certain choices about how they govern their relationship to crime. They must choose appropriate places to live, work, and educate their children. This neoliberal response to crime is materialized in consumer trends towards gated communities and sports utility vehicles (SUVs) as a means of privatized security, in addition to increasing parental monitoring and governance of their children's behavior.

Less dramatically, governmentality provides a buttress to home-ownership and home improvement. Home-lifestyle programs reflect and promote the home-ownership ideology (Kemeny 1983). They highlight the significant role played by the owner-occupied home in Australia, Britain, and the USA (Allon 2008; Brunsdon 2003), where home-ownership is central to cultural citizenship to the extent that it flattens (but does not erase) cultural and class differences. In Australia, the home-ownership ideology was actively supported by the state. After the Second World War, the federal government sought to increase home-ownership. It directly intervened in the home finance market and by the mid-1950s had become the largest supplier of owner-occupied home-loans, claiming one third of the market, growing to 40 percent by the mid-1960s (Kemeny 1983: 6–22). Home-ownership rates grew from around 50 percent in the first half of the twentieth century to nearly 70 percent by 1961 (Greig 1995: 1–2), and they have remained steady at approximately 70 percent ever since (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2010). Once home-ownership is established, DIY home improvement provides further support to it as a process of governmentality. Through the physical enactment of neoliberal processes of individual responsibility, citizens take *control* of their own lives and provide them with order and stability. Through their aesthetic transformations—guided by lifestyle television—householders

construct a unique form of symbolic protection from the dangerous outside world.

Lifestyle television has typically presented the home as an ordered sanctuary and as the space for protection. Laurel Forster (2008) argues that by evoking an idealized household of an imagined past, domestic lifestyle programs "produce a nostalgic yearning for a perfect home and family," where both real and metaphorical clutter—disorder—does not, and cannot, exist (2008: 104). In the American context, Madeleine Shufeldt Esch (2008) has argued that the proliferation of home-lifestyle programs overlapped with an emerging fantasy called "cocooning." This refers to the dovetailing of a fantasy of retreat from the public sphere—primarily for working women—with a so-called American love of home. Shufeldt Esch argues that despite the lack of demographic evidence of this phenomenon, it has renewed attention upon the relationship between women and the home.

A host of lifestyle and reality programs have focused on this gendered spatial relationship and the idealized image of the "housewife." Forster (2008) has examined these themes in a range of British programs, such as *Perfect Housewife*, and its focus upon the performance of the decorous middle-class housewife; *Wife Swap*, and the differences in classed-based female household management; and various other forms of domestic order in *How Clean is Your House?* She argues that regardless of the mode of delivery, these programs all elevate the "supremacy of the domestic realm for women in particular" (2008: 104). Thus, whilst the external world may be complex, chaotic, and risky, the interior world can be ordered and simplified through female labor (2008: 104–5).

This ordering of the domestic world is achieved via the guidance of lifestyle experts. Tania Lewis (2008a) suggests that mediated lifestyle experts have deviated from the traditional idea of the expert as a rational, objective professional, deploying specialized and credentialed knowledge, exemplified by the scientist. In contrast, she suggests that the expertise portrayed within popular lifestyle media is less structured, rational, and credentialed. Mediated lifestyle experts, such as landscape gardeners, chefs, and decorators, focus more on "softer" issues related to domestic and personal advice. They are engaged in the "informationalization" of everyday life, the promotion of everyday skills and knowledge (2008a: 2). According to Lewis, it is the lifestyle expert—rather than the scientist—who guides us in forms of neoliberal citizenship, as they disseminate practical governance techniques for us to reflect upon, manage, and improve ourselves. They teach us how to conduct and empower ourselves as enterprising citizens (Ouellette and Hay 2008: 2), not only to deal with the risks of late modernity, but also the notion that we cannot just "survive," but must flourish, within it.

The programs I focus upon in this article, *Is Your House Killing You?* and *Carbon Cops*, differ from most forms of home-lifestyle television

in two key ways. First, the presenter-experts blur the categories of the scientific expert and the lifestyle expert. They constitute a "scientific lifestyle expert," who possesses the "rational and objective" knowledge of the "scientist," but deploys it in relation to the "softer" issues of domestic and personal advice characteristic of the lifestyle expert and similarly disseminates disciplinary, behavioral, and self-governance techniques.

Second, where most home-lifestyle television represents the home as a sanctuary, both programs under examination here explicitly employ a discourse of risk to present the home as a site of danger, but they do so in different ways. The menacingly titled *Is Your House Killing You?* constructs the home as a source of danger to the private sphere, as a risk to householder health. Each week the dangers lurking within a home are exposed, as the program seeks to change domestic behaviors that produce, or exacerbate, potential health risks. *Carbon Cops*, conversely, constructs homes as a source of a much larger danger, which threatens the public sphere, via a risk to planetary health. Each week a family is chosen and their domestic-related impact on the environment is measured, which is generally well above average. They are chastised and a disciplinary regime is established to minimize energy use and reduce the threat to the global environment. For although the scientific lifestyle experts under examination here do construct the home as dangerous, their aim is not only to produce fear and anxiety, but also to provide mechanisms to ease that anxiety, to teach audiences how to remove such threats, and restore the home as a site of material and symbolic protection.

These programs both screen on public service television: *Carbon Cops* on the national broadcaster, the ABC, and *Is Your House Killing You?* on the multicultural broadcaster, SBS. The ABC, which is fully funded by Australian taxpayers, has operated as radio since 1932, and television since 1956. SBS Television began in 1980 with state funding, which has been recently subsidized by commercial advertising. The ABC mirrors the Reithian public service model of the BBC, which aims to "inform, educate and entertain" its citizens. SBS also follows this model, but has a "special" task: "to communicate with and represent the [ethnic] diversity of Australian society" (McClean 2008: 67–8). It was developed in a period of widespread political support for multiculturalism, and its role within—and necessity for—Australian culture is periodically questioned (see Cunningham 2009; Flew 2009). Both of these networks are less popular than their three commercial rivals, having a combined audience share of approximately 20 percent, with the ABC having three times as much as SBS (see de Solier 2008). Like all television networks under increasing market pressures, both have turned to lower-cost reality or factual television (see Holmes and Jermyn 2004). The ABC has a longer history of developing such programming, including the house and garden variety. However by the late 1990s, most home-related lifestyle television appeared on the

commercial networks (Rosenberg 2009). Since this period, Australian public service television has turned its attention to developing and screening local and imported food lifestyle programming, aiming for a more middle-class cosmopolitan viewer (de Solier 2008), rather than the mass working-class audience of the commercial home-lifestyle programs. The two shows analyzed here, then, do not mark a significant reemergence of home-related programming on Australian public television, but they nevertheless provide a rich site for analyzing the potent meanings circulating the home today.

IS YOUR HOUSE KILLING YOU?: DANGEROUS HOUSES AS A RISK TO THE PRIVATE SPHERE

One of the forerunners to *Is Your House Killing You?*, which provides a productive source of comparison for my purposes here, is the British program, *How Clean is Your House?* Forster describes it as a lifestyle makeover show that is concerned with the battle against dirt: "Dirt and grime are seen as the enemy, to be exposed, beaten back and banished" (2008: 105). The show highlights the potentially dangerous implications of having a dirty house and teaches the audience strategies for overcoming this problem. It does deploy the occasional scientific close-up of dangerous bacteria, but science takes a back seat, as this program operates more along moral class lines to discipline, punish, and ultimately transform the poorly behaving, even slovenly, participants (Forster 2008: 105–7). Whilst it fits within neoliberal strategies of personal responsibility—to clean up after oneself—it also strays into Beverley Skeggs' (2007) nuanced view of lifestyle television, as offering less a regime of neoliberal governance and more of a Scottish moral liberal approach whereby citizens "need" expert instruction.

Questions of dirt, pollution, and disorder likewise underpin *Is Your House Killing You?*, but to a different end. In *How Clean is Your House?,* dirt is framed within an explicit discourse of morality, and the dirt is also observable. The danger posed by dirt here is more a risk to one's status, or reputation as a "proper" housewife, than to one's health. In contrast, *Is Your House Killing You?* is explicitly concerned with the health impact of dirt and of other invisible toxic pollutants in the home. So whilst class-based moral overtones are present in *How Clean is Your House?*, *Is Your House Killing You?* is more concerned with broader material and symbolic processes surrounding the home as a safe haven. The latter program raises the stakes, asking the viewer to consider not only if the dirt in their house could be threatening their social standing, but if it could be threatening their life.

What is the significance of dirt that unites these domestic lifestyle programs? In *Purity and Danger*, Mary Douglas (1966) develops a theory of dirt. She argues that "dirt is essentially disorder … Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organise the environment" (1966: 2). She suggests

that we order our lives through our management of dirt and pollution, and that there is a symbolic dimension to our contact with dirt, particularly when such contact is perceived as dangerous (1966: 3). The home is a central site in this management of the real and symbolic threats posed by dirt. This is apparent in *Is Your House Killing You?*, for it is not just the health of the householders that is of concern to the program, but also the defense of the home as a symbolic site of protection. Thus it operates on two planes of protection: biomedical and symbolic.

The home, then, is a key battleground against dirt, with women generally on the front lines. Such housewifely cleaning practices are usually discussed in terms of drudgery and unpaid female labor (Oakley 1974), but work is emerging that focuses more upon the creative and productive capacities of fighting dirt (Pink 2004). Drawing on ethnographic research, Lydia Martens (2007) argues that cleaning is built upon three cultural priorities: countering germs; taste and aesthetics; and concerns over ease of cleaning. She found that people approached cleaning in different ways. Some sought to continually keep on top of the cleaning to create order, while others needed to reach a threshold of visible dirt to compel them to clean. Interestingly, many people—particularly those with children—focused less on aesthetics and more on hygiene, both as an act of care and risk management, but also a means of efficiency, to limit unnecessary cleaning to create more time with their family (Martens 2007).

Cleaning requires a focus on both the visible and the invisible. Joseph Amato argues that dust was once the smallest thing humans could see, an "omnipresent boundary … between the visible and the invisible" (2000: 1–2). In Victorian England, public health officials and sanitarians declared war on dust. Cities were targeted, but so, too, were homes. Amato notes the rise in domestic cleaning manuals for women and servants to help fight dust. Electricity and trends towards larger windows made dust more visible, and twentieth-century commodities like vacuum cleaners and washing machines helped bring dust under control (Amato 2000: 9–11).

Whilst dust was linked to disease, advances in microscope technology saw it superseded by even smaller and invisible threats. In the last decades of the nineteenth century, scientists developed a theory of disease known as "germ theory," which suggested that invisible microbes were linked to deadly diseases such as tuberculosis and cholera. It triggered the deployment of the largest public health initiatives then witnessed, including campaigns to convince citizens that microscopic particles were the cause of contagion (Tomes 1998: 5–7), which focused upon the home as a site of microbiological danger.

Yet because germs cannot be seen, as Elizabeth Shove writes, "there are no obvious indicators of their effective elimination. Questions about how and how much to clean consequently arise [which] carry with them a burden of responsibility" (2003: 87), one

which experts seek to lighten. Like the nineteenth-century campaigns against dust, the early twentieth century saw the emergence of a domestic science movement that sought to ease the anxiety of housewives and mothers through education campaigns about how to make their homes healthier (Tomes 1998). Education shifted from nineteenth-century household management publications to the mobilization of a whole range of domestic-related experts to fight the invisible threats. As Tomes describes, "an army of new female professionals, including home economists, visiting nurses, and social workers, dedicated themselves to bringing the insights of 'household bacteriology' to every homemaker in the nation" (1998: 9–10). Today, such experts and expert guidance have found a new home on television.

If dirt creates disorder, then the invisible, microscopic dirt that only the scientists can see on *Is Your House Killing You?* creates a heightened sense of fear and disorder compared to that induced by visible dirt. The specter of invisible dangers and the need for expert intervention dovetail in the introduction to each episode, which states that each week:

> A crack team of experts get to grips with the unseen domestic dangers putting real families' health at risk. From noxious chemicals to biohazards, your house could be hiding a toxic time bomb of invisible threats. But helping families detox their homes, and protect their health, is our team of environmental scientists: Dr Peter Dingle and Cedric Chong. Together, they've got the knowledge, the experience and the technology, to reveal a secret world of hidden dangers.

These experts hail from the masculine realm of scientific expertise: armed with their knowledge, experience, and technology, they are the only ones who can see these "unseen dangers" and "invisible threats," and we need their help to protect us from our homes. Like all lifestyle makeover programs, the interventionist experts are there to highlight badly behaving citizens and to solve problems. Their role is to "transform" and "optimize" (Lewis 2009: 1) the lives of the makeover recipients, by offering them techniques to become self-governing, self-regulating, and self-improving enterprising citizens.

Through a close analysis of a representative episode of *Is Your House Killing You?* I want to examine how the experts discipline and transform poorly behaving citizens, and how they heighten and then ease their anxieties surrounding "dangerous" houses. In this episode, the team visits an English lower-middle-class family, the Waltons, who migrated to the lush hinterland suburbs of southern Queensland to be "near enough" to nature. Yet Kevin and Sarah Walton quickly learnt that paradise was not what it seemed. The hot subtropical climate created problems for their dream home. Frequent storms wash away their garden, and the climate attracts another threat, termites,

which "take your house away, bite by bite." Using chemically treated timber, Kevin hand-built a "fortress" around the house, and sprayed pesticides to protect the home from termites, but as the disapproving narrator points out: "Little did they know that in protecting themselves from the environment, they created another danger closer to home, and a job for our team."

The experts Dr Peter Dingle and Cedric Chong enter the home, meet the family, and lead them through their poor and potentially life-threatening decisions. They question the use of dangerous pesticides, to which Sarah responds: "There's just so many chemicals that you use all the time now … so it's just one of many." But the major concern for the experts is the use of chemically treated timber around the house, garden, and pool-deck. It has been treated with CCA (Copper Chrome Arsenate treatment), which is toxic and potentially fatal. Each plank "contains enough arsenic to kill 200 people." This lethal chemical can leech from the timber and onto the skin through the pool decking, or it can be ingested through the contamination of food in the vegetable patch. The experts are especially concerned with the amount of contaminated dust produced by Kevin cutting the timber, and its impact on his own health, and his family's health as a consequence of contaminated dust entering the house. This particular example combines the fear of dust and microscopic health threats into one (Amato 2000; Tomes 1998).

Having established the risks, the experts heighten the family's (and viewer's) anxiety levels by deploying certain scientific signifiers. We see several shots of environmental scientist Chong operating high-tech gadgets, taking samples, and testing them in a laboratory. Such technology is a central means by which the scientists demonstrate their expertise, but it also possesses symbolic power to protect individuals from the instability of risk. It creates order. Yet such technology can also *increase* ontological insecurity. Here, the family is blood-tested for traces of the deadly chemical. The producers use close-ups of the family's faces to heighten the drama, so viewers can search for the revelation of what Rachel Moseley (2000) calls "authenticity." Meanwhile, Sarah describes her fears of the possibility of ill health: "It's really worrying that we've got something here that we're living with, that actually is pretty harmful to our health," and an anxious Kevin dramatically adds: "I've no idea what this stuff can do to me, or us."

The experts confirm the family's fears: the house is contaminated. Their blood tests, however, were normal, yet these tests only show up short-term effects: the real danger lies in the long-term effects of exposure, which can lead to cancer. Dingle tells the family: "We can't say you're going to get sick or not. What we want to do is try and prevent you from getting sick by helping you take action now." This mirrors a neoliberal approach to the modern welfare state, in particular, active aging programs, which aim to reduce the public health-care

burden of the aged through personal responsibility and preventative healthcare (Asquith 2009). But where this approach is used by the state to reduce welfare provisions, the scientific lifestyle experts use it here as a means to gain access to the lives of citizens, in order to work upon "correcting" their behavior. Hence, for individuals to progress to neoliberal selfhood, they must first be subject to governmental techniques (Foucault 1991).

In order to avert this long-term risk, the experts set out to transform the domestic behavior and practices of the Waltons, to turn their dangerous *house* into a protective *home*. But first, a process of disciplining takes place, in which Dingle chastises the family for their risky behavior. He focuses upon the actions of Kevin, and the inaction by Sarah, which have contributed to their dangerous house. He admonishes Kevin for disregarding the dangers of using such timber, and for not wearing protective clothing. He then asks Sarah whether she was concerned about Kevin using the chemically treated timber. She responds defensively to this accusation of inaction, and steers the expert's disciplinary gaze back to the unsafe and irresponsible practices of her husband: "He's got masks and stuff, he just doesn't use them." Hence, it is Kevin's personal behavior that is putting both him *and* the rest of his family at risk and legitimizes the necessity of expert incursions into the domestic realm.

The experts then get to work correcting these poorly performing individuals and their dangerous house. They teach them techniques to transform themselves into responsible self-governing and self-regulating citizens. For example, they apply a protective sealant to timber areas, which needs constant reapplication by Kevin to reduce further contamination. The vegetable patch is moved away from contaminated areas, and the experts explain different alternatives to pesticides to kill termites. Commodities are central to this process of governmentality. After admonishing Kevin, Dingle gives him protective clothing and a high-tech vacuum to remove any contaminated dust he may carry into the house. Sarah, too, receives commodities to fight contamination, in the form of fiber-technology cleaning products, which reinforce the connection between consumption, protection, and improvement.

The final minutes of the program involve the "reveal" scene, the key generic device of makeover television (Moseley 2000), yet in this case it is less spectacular than most home-makeover programs, which focus on dramatic aesthetic transformations. Here, the experts return months later to find the Waltons have heeded their call. As the narrator states: "With the team's help, they've given their home and their habits some serious attention." Inside the house, "new toys and new routines have cleared the house of CCA dust," and Kevin is finally wearing face masks and protective clothing. Dingle reviews the process, saying that when they first arrived the Waltons were not aware of the health risks lurking in their house. So while they felt safe

in their home, this was a false sense of security. Yet after the scientific lifestyle experts intervened to both expose and avert the dangers, "now you've got a place where you feel *safe*, because you've done something about that problem *we* identified." Ontological security has been restored, but this time it is based on rational scientific truths.

The Waltons agree that they now understand—and hence can manage—the problem related to health dangers in the home. Kevin explains how he has changed his behavior in terms of an awareness of what potential pollutants he brings into the house and declares that he no longer uses the treated timber. Sarah goes further and claims she now has a "more general awareness about everything you use, in terms of just asking more questions about products you are using, particularly those that are chemicals or other treatments … about generally being better informed." These individuals, then, have come under the critical gaze of scientific lifestyle experts and been transformed into responsible neoliberal citizens in the process. They have been disciplined and learnt techniques of self-governance and self-management, which have allowed them to control risk in relation to domestic health threats, such that their dangerous house is now a sanctuary.

CARBON COPS: DANGEROUS HOUSES AS A RISK TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL PUBLIC SPHERE

As with *Is Your House Killing You?*, Douglas's (1966) logic of purity and danger and the pursuit of order also functions in relation to *Carbon Cops*. Yet in this case, rather than dirt and pollution destabilizing the home and its inhabitants, the reverse is taking place. The home and its inhabitants are the source of dirt and pollution which is leading to disorder in the earth's ecology in the form of climate change. Rather than the home being a risk to its inhabitants, then, on *Carbon Cops* the home and its inhabitants are presented as a dangerous risk to the global environment.

Also like *Is Your House Killing You?*, *Carbon Cops* promotes fear through the specter of threats unseen, which are again highlighted in the program's opening credits: "Every time we use energy, carbon emissions are produced. Now you can't actually see them but they're released into the atmosphere and contribute to climate change." It too focuses upon ordinary people whose home and domestic practices—in particular, consumption—are subject to the critical gaze and governmental techniques of scientific lifestyle experts. Each episode begins with an introduction of a dangerous household, which "threatens" the planet by over-consuming energy. The program serves as a critique of suburban consumer culture, which places it in a unique position within the genre of lifestyle television.

Consumption is central to most forms of lifestyle television, and to scholarly critiques of it. For example, Gareth Palmer has argued that "lifestyle television is an agent of consumerism at the heart of

which is a belief in the market and the importance of positive change" (2008: 6). Similarly, June Deery argues that makeover programs offer a space for capitalism to appropriate and commodify all manner of experiences and sell them at a profit, and "promote an all-encompassing and infallible consumerist ethos" (2006: 159). There is an overlap between morality and consumption here too. Guy Redden sees makeover television as an important component of a wider consumer culture with its optimistic and moralistic narratives about life getting better through consumption (2007: 152). Such programs, then, are seen to promote the idea that consumption can make you and your life better as "consumers are urged to improve self and environment or be perceived as both materially and ethically lacking" (Deery 2006: 160).

However, recent lifestyle programming has placed more emphasis on responsible forms of consumption and citizenship. This began in relation to excessive food consumption and its impact upon health, in shows like *Honey, We're Killing the Kids* and *The Biggest Loser* (Lewis 2008a). But more recent offerings have focused on the connection between consumer lifestyles and the environment. Lifestyle programs have "gone green," and the house and home feature prominently in this environmental turn. The steady stream of environmental lifestyle programs or "eco-reality" shows—such as *No Waste Like Home* and *It's Not Easy Being Green* in Britain, *Eco House Challenge* and *Carbon Cops* in Australia, and *Code Green Canada*—fit within what Lyn Thomas calls the "moralizing landscape" of lifestyle television, which seeks to criticize, mold, and improve participant and viewer behavior (2008: 178). She argues that these "eco" shows share the neoliberal focus on self-improvement and individual solutions characteristic of lifestyle television more generally, but they take place within a cultural context where the expert advice proffered has "a broader social and political relevance [...] where the changes brought about are relevant to human and ecological survival rather than individual identity and appearance" (2008: 178).

Lewis (2008b) has suggested that the rise of green-lifestyle television reflects two key phenomena. The first is that environmental problems are increasingly a mainstream concern, which may be leading to a normalization of ethical consumption. Ethical consumption involves people considering the impact of their consumption choices on both the environment and distant others, through consuming environmentally friendly or fair-trade products (Littler 2009). Whilst the care of others is a crucial trope within ethical consumption, the self is also molded in particular ways through such practices. Clive Barnett *et al.* argue that by participating in ethical consumption, individuals are engaged in a process of "moral selving," or "the mediated work of creating oneself as a more virtuous person through practices that acknowledge responsibilities to others" (2005: 30). And while Lewis (2008b) points to a mainstreaming of ethical consumption, there may

be a disjuncture between consumer discourse and practice as Daniel Miller (2001) observed in his ethnography of shopping in London, where shoppers were well-versed in the discourse of ethical consumption, but generally avoided purchasing ethical products (2001: 111–44). Furthermore, in a study that dealt specifically with people who identified as committed green consumers, John Connolly and Andrea Prothero (2008) found that negotiation and compromise, often based on maintaining familial and social relationships, undermine the well-intentioned aims of environmentally sustainable consumption.

The second key phenomenon that Lewis (2008b) sees reflected in green-lifestyle television is that popular media have taken on an increasingly civic and educational role, which may be reshaping the nature of contemporary citizenship (see also Couldry 2006). Eco-lifestyle programs reflect an increasingly interventionist role for popular media within civic culture. Such programs also add another dimension to wider debates about the relationship between the home and citizenship. I have already discussed the role of the home-ownership ideology, which places the consumption of houses as central to national belonging or cultural citizenship in countries like Australia (see also Allon 2008). Fiona Allon argues that whilst such consumption has been central to one type of cultural citizenship, it has also been critiqued as a form of privatization and a retreat from social and political citizenship in the form of civic engagement. However, she argues that through ethical consumption practices within the home—such as the energy reduction practices highlighted in *Carbon Cops* and other domestic eco-programs—the sustainable home can offer a "*reinvention* of citizenship and patriotic duty more than its retreat and withdrawal" (Allon 2011: 207).

Hence eco-lifestyle programs that focus upon the most important commodity for Australians, the house, offer a vehicle to debate and critique the relationship between climate change, capitalism, and consumer culture. Most of them have engaged in some form of critique of consumerism, usually of individualized forms of overconsumption often dubbed "affluenza" (Hamilton and Denniss 2005). Sam Binkley and Jo Littler (2008) have mapped this emerging critique of consumerism within popular culture and found two ideal-type positions. The first is the "anti-consumerist" position, which is not generally opposed to consumption, but is more concerned with finding alternatives to the existing forms of consumer capitalism. The second is the "anti-consumption" position, which seeks to fundamentally reduce consumption altogether. Most eco-lifestyle programs fit within the first camp, but contain some tendencies of the latter. For example, *Carbon Cops* is more concerned with *maintaining* existing lifestyles, including the suburban home, but making them more sustainable, through reducing but not eliminating consumption.

In *Carbon Cops*, the scientific lifestyle experts propose that overconsumption is an environmental threat. Our homes and households

are crucial sites of carbon emissions where consumption leads not to improvement, as Redden (2007) suggests, but degradation. The program, then, makes a clear link between individual actions and climate change. In contrast to Deery's (2006) argument that lifestyle programs encourage audiences to consume more or be perceived as ethically lacking, *Carbon Cops* suggests that it is precisely such consumption that results in individuals being ethically lacking. In *Carbon Cops*, individuals are encouraged to move away from large environmentally damaging houses, to consume smaller, more energy-efficient homes. Thus, far from promoting a consumerist ethos and encouraging individuals to consume, the experts on *Carbon Cops* advocate the adoption of environmentally reflexive consumption practices that reduce total consumption. Such "appropriate" consumption, they argue, will reduce the domestic carbon footprint and slow down climate change.

The episode of *Carbon Cops* under consideration here focuses on the Bettanay-Fletcher family, a six-member, three-generation family (two grandparents, parents, and children) who live in a large rental house on "Melbourne's sprawling suburban fringe." The property is described as "enormous," with "every conceivable facility"—including a pool, spa, and tennis court—yet "living the high-life costs plenty for the environment and the hip pocket." The family's energy bills cost more than the rent, which has reduced their capacity to save money whilst they build new houses in inner Melbourne. The expert hosts of this program, the "Carbon Cops," are environmental scientists Lish Fejer and Sean Fitzgerald, who are "on the lookout for energy wasters." As part of their aim "to get all Australian households to cut their carbon emissions in half," their task is to criticize, discipline, and transform the behavior of each household they visit.

Whilst *Carbon Cops* fundamentally performs a critique of overconsumption, it mediates this critique through science and technology. Fitzgerald notes this, saying:

> Our first task is to conduct a full energy audit of the house. Using the latest technology, we can work out precisely the carbon emissions being produced by the Bettanay-Fletcher household.

Then the disciplinary process takes place. Fitzgerald enters one room full of cables and appliances to measure the family's carbon footprint. He winces in anguish and mouths "Oh my god!" at the high emissions reading. This is more than a scientific shock at the amount of energy use, however. It taps into an elitist cultural critique of ordinary suburbanites, which has a long history in Australia (Healy 1994). This critique of the suburbs and the home-ownership dream has been led by architectural critics and planners, the most famous being Arthur Boyd (1960) in his classic book *The Australian Ugliness*. Boyd was, paradoxically, both a critic of elitist views on the suburbs and among their key exponents. The elitist critique of the poor tastes

of suburban homeowners undermines the hard work of working-class people, many of whom built their suburban homes themselves, the "suburban pioneers" who valued independence and comfort over architectural innovation (see Davison and Davison 1995; Dingle 2000). As the trend towards commodifying homes through model-home construction companies gathered pace (Dovey 1994), the critique shifted from questions of taste to morality. The educated urban elites today attack the "vapid" consumerism of the outer-suburban lower-middle class, writing them off as mindless, selfish, and dangerous, through their "overconsumption" of "super-sized" McMansions and plasma televisions (see Allon 2008; Hamilton and Denniss 2005). So while this cultural critique has traditionally been couched within modes of taste and class distinction, the energy-intensive outer-suburban McMansions have come under renewed attack as concerns over climate change have become more widespread, and such critiques are increasingly framed in environmental and moral terms.

After the scientific lifestyle experts survey the family's substantial energy consumption, they reveal the results of the carbon emissions audit. Fitzgerald states that "the average Australian household produces 14 tons of carbon emissions every year," but the Bettanay-Fletchers' is "much worse." They produce 95 tons, which is five times the average (although there is no mention that this three-generational household is above average size). In order to reduce their emissions, the Bettanay-Fletchers are told they must discipline their energy-intensive lifestyle through behavioral transformation. The family is challenged to radically reduce their energy consumption by half over one week. Natalie, the mother, asks if this means living without televisions and lights. Fejer responds "absolutely not," they should live "normally" but be conscious of their energy use, in the hope of meeting their target now and into the future. The program then becomes more explicitly didactic, with scenes demonstrating just how "easy" it can be to make a house less ecologically dangerous. The family reduces energy by switching off unused lights and appliances; implementing more multi-task car journeys; replacing ordinary light bulbs with energy-efficient ones; and even selling some of the "excessive" electronic gadgets.

Whilst *Carbon Cops* is driven by a logic of turning ecologically dangerous houses into more environmentally friendly homes, fiscal logic is also ever-present. The experts' energy reduction techniques—behavioral change—are always translated into a fiscal language for the family (and audience). The ecological discourse of "saving energy" is immediately translated into "saving money." The fiscal concerns motivate the family's need for reducing energy consumption, with any improvement to the environment a bonus. This logic is demonstrated in a scene in which we are informed that the family's electricity bills alone cost AU$1600 per quarter. Fejer asks the father, Paul, how he feels about this "astronomical amount," for which he is largely responsible

through his penchant for electronic gadgets. He feels somewhat guilty, yet he is not also asked about his concerns regarding the impact upon the environment, merely the monetary cost of energy use.

In their week-long challenge to reduce their carbon emissions, the Bettanay-Fletcher family engaged in precisely the form of energy consumption deemed "appropriate" by the experts: less. We are informed that "they've changed a lot of bad habits," and managed to nearly halve their emissions. Just like the Waltons, they have had their everyday practices scrutinized and judged by scientific lifestyle experts; they have been disciplined; and they have worked at self-correcting such behavioral "problems." Their house is far less dangerous to the environment than it once was, and we are informed that they plan to build new energy-efficient homes. This family is no longer presented as "bad citizens." What has taken place here is a disciplining of their consumption habits in relation to the level of carbon emissions they produce. And whilst it attacked certain forms of consumption—notably "excessive" consumption of large houses and consumer goods—which is rare for lifestyle television, *Carbon Cops* promoted forms of environmentally sustainable consumption. The reduction of "bad" consumption in terms of energy had a pay-off for the family's disposable income, as their energy bills were reduced. The program constantly noted the financial savings gained by reducing energy consumption, which can then be spent on other forms of consumption, ultimately tempering *Carbon Cops*' anti-consumerist rhetoric (see also Rosenberg 2009).

CONCLUSION

Outside of providing advice on how to increase property values through aesthetic transformation, home-lifestyle television has traditionally been preoccupied with constructing the home as a sanctuary. This article, however, has explored how recent Australian home-lifestyle programming has presented the home as a site of danger and risk. *Is Your House Killing You?* challenges the myth of the home as a sanctuary by demonstrating, through science, the invisible microscopic health dangers present in peoples' houses. Rather than presenting homes as offering protection, it presents them as being potentially lethal. *Carbon Cops* also presents the home as dangerous, but not only to its inhabitants. It suggests that homes are sites of energy-intensive consumption, and pose a dangerous risk to the global environment through their impact on climate change.

In addition to rethinking the home as a dangerous place, both for the inhabitants of the private sphere and the wider environmental public sphere, this article was concerned with the role lifestyle television and (scientific) lifestyle experts play in disseminating neoliberal ideologies. They begin by using science to criticize the bad and dangerous behavior of householders, in terms of unhealthy domestic practices in *Is Your House Killing You?*, and "excessive" energy

consumption in *Carbon Cops*. They implement governmental regimes to discipline, transform, and ultimately self-regulate householder and consumer behavior. Through such regimes, the subjects produce less dangerous houses, and the home is restored as a sanctuary and site of ontological security. They learn to protect themselves and the planet, and become recognized by the experts and the audience as good, self-governing neoliberal citizens.

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